

INTRODUCTION

vin
 donist Menalque of the *Noumtures terrestres*, the cruel
 and bewildered
 superman Michel of *Ulmoraliste*; the seductive
 Lafcadio of *Les Caves*
du Vatican, curious of the world and of himself, whose
 self-expression
 extends to committing a gratuitous murder; the
 Corydon of the four
 Socratic dialogues named after him; and the amoral
 novelist Edoimrd
 of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. For these writings, with a
 few others, were
 the ones that had created scandals periodically
 throughout the first fifty
 years of Andre Gide's career.

Like any original thinker and artist, he early began
 to scandalize.
 His contemporaries were shocked when he returned
 from his first trip to
 Africa in 1895 and*mocked them in the first of his ironic
 works, *Paludes*,
 that brilliant satire on banality and moral stagnation
 written with special
 reference to the literary circles he knew so well.
 But already before
 he started out in the autumn of 1893, Andre Gide sensed
 — as is evident
 from his leaving behind his familiar Bible—that this trip
 was to effect
 more than his conscious break with symbolism;
 indeed, that it was to
 mark the great turning-point in his life. Doubtless this
 would have been
 so even if he had not fallen ill at Biskra and approached
 death so closely
 that his long convalescence seemed a resuscitation. For
 without the re-
 sultant discovery of the value of life and of that ardor
 which gives life its
 zest, he would nevertheless have learned the secret of
 his tormented
 nature. But the escape from death, the self-
 identification with Lazarus,
 helped form the resolve not to stifle his unorthodox
 inclinations.

"In the name of what God, of what ideal, do
 you forbid me to live ac-
 cording to my nature?*" he cries in his memoirs.
 "And, where would that nature
 lead me if I simply followed it? Until now I had
 followed the rule of Christ or
 at least a certain puritanism that had been taught
 me as the rule of Christ. My
 only reward for having striven to submit to it had

been a complete physical
and spiritual upset. I could not agree to live
without a code, and the demands
of my flesh required the consent of my mind. But
then I began to wonder
whether God himself called for such coercion;
whether it was not blasphemous to resist constantly, and whether it was not
against him; whether, in
that struggle which was dividing me, it was logical
to decide against the other.
Eventually I sensed that this discordant dualism
could perhaps be resolved
into a harmony. And immediately it occurred to me
that that harmony was to
be my sovereign aim and seeking to achieve it
the evident justification of
my life/*

Uprooting himself then from his entire past, he
attempted to resolve his
vital conflict by suppressing all that education, in the
broadest sense,
had added to nature. But how difficult this was for such
a man one can
realize from the capital entry in his journals for 10
October 1893 with its
revealing remark: "Yet the habit of asceticism was
such that in the be-
ginning I had to force myself toward joy. . . ."

After such an experience it is but natural that the
work that followed